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# Kipling's Women

By JESSIE B. SHERWOOD, Chicago

KIPLING has been aptly called the prince of twentieth century British story tellers and, doubtless, earned this encomium through his adherence to truth, his broad though precise treatment of humanity with its manifold labors, and his iconoclastic spirit of independence. Without doubt he has intrenched himself in the hearts of the Anglo-Saxon world more widely and more solidly than any other writer since Dickens—who, more than any other, has enriched the language of the people with words and phrases that have become part of our verbal medium of exchange, the legal tender of our current speech.

Kipling is ever new in spite of all that has been written about his decline, for he is an erratic and undisciplined genius who is always doing the strange and unexpected, always refusing to be definitely labeled as the story teller of India, the self-appointed laureate of Tommy Atkins, or as any other specific writer of tales, for he is a genius too large to be limited by the average qualifying adjectives. His works have proven that he has the natural instinct of the story teller and he grew up in a land where this instinct is bred in the bone, and where many of the oldest tales of the world, which have since migrated to every civilized country, were first slowly wrought into shape, gathering perfection as they were passed down by word of mouth through uncounted generations.

Kipling has never allowed any person or thing to interfere with his literary prerogatives but he has exercised the most complete independence in all his work and has ruthlessly broken all the laws and traditions of the art of letters in order to attain his desired end. In his early writings there was much satire in the treatment of his characters, particularly women, one is some-

times tempted to believe, when the laughter of scorn is felt in many stories and poems, and a great lack of charity. The Anglo-Indian world of which he was a member felt the sting in many of his earlier writings, which was lost to the greater outside world, for many of the queer appellations used in his stories and poems, stood for names of men and women widely known in the circles the poet frequented and the sharp personalities struck home.

The *American Bookman* once commented on his independent style as follows: "I will write what I please. I will not alter a line. If it pleases me to do so I will refer to her Gracious Majesty—bless her!—as the little fat widow of Windsor, and fill the mouth of Mulvaney with filth and oaths. I will not 'meet people.' If I am on ship-board and prefer passing my time in the smoking-room drinking Scotch whiskey I will do so. I will not truckle to old women or fawn upon fools. Here is my work. You may take it or leave it. I am playing off my own bat. I am traveling alone—always alone." This, according to the *Bookman*, is the keynote of Kipling's work.

In his early days, all his work was marked by a spirit of unalloyed self-assurance, a trait which was so keenly felt by Henry James that he once remarked: "Extreme youth is indeed what I may call his window-bar—the support on which he somewhat rowdily leans while he looks down at the human scene with his pipe in his teeth."

When Kipling was about six years old, he was taken from India to England and left, together with a younger sister, in the care of an elderly relative at Southsea and, it is believed that he spent several unhappy years there. If that is true, then the opening chapters of "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," and "The Light that Failed," are largely autobiographical and it is not surprising that

he has delineated some very disagreeable women as the children's guardians. In the former story, two children of Anglo-Indian parents are committed to the care of an aunt in England, who is a most unlovely woman, who has some affection for the little girl, but hates the boy, Punch, and subjects him to a series of petty torments in the name of her Puritanical religion until he becomes the evil "Black Sheep" that she has pronounced him. Similarly in "The Light That Failed," Dick Helder and Maisie are left in the care of a Mrs. Jennett, a woman with narrow, withering religious ideas, whose over-scrupulous rules drive her charges into all sorts of trifling transgressions.

Maisie and the other women characters in the latter story are almost as ruthless and reprehensible in their development as the guardians of the children and one wonders if Kipling cares to draw a pleasing woman for his readers. Though Maisie and Dick were drawn together in childhood by their loneliness, their paths eventually separate in their pursuit of art. Although it is stated that "Maisie is not heartless, but just self-absorbed, ambitious, individualistic and firmly convinced that life holds rich rewards awaiting the development of her powers as an artist, the powers which the love-stricken Dick, secure in the instinct of genius, knows only too well bears the stamp of mediocrity," yet to the reader she seems utterly cold and unresponsive even in the face of Dick's approaching blindness and desolation. One wonders that Dick's unconquerable love for the girl does not suffer under her indifference to his suffering. When the sword-cut across his forehead begins to affect his optic nerves and he works on his masterpiece, "Melancholia," one is glad that the guttersnipe, Bessie Broke, who acts as his model, shows him a little kindness, in spite of her mercenary motive. Even she is not permitted a fair measure of goodness by Kipling, for she shows an unusually vindictive nature when she destroys

the canvas upon which Dick had toiled so eagerly in his race against blindness. A Scottish reviewer was correct when he stated that the story is needlessly hard and gratuitously brutal."

Kipling's pronounced penchant for men who are powerful in the work of the world also extends to his women, as he has little time for flaccid, washed-out women who can't ride a horse or run a house. He has scant sympathy with the idle women of the military stations of India or any other place and gives their idle minds much of evil to do. Character drawing, however, has been named as Kipling's weakest point. After reading his stories one is left with an impression of remarkably vigorous delineation, but not with the feeling that one has watched the natural and inevitable growth of character. Hardly anybody, woman or man, develops in Kipling. Maisie and Dick are the same at the end of the book as at the outset. Mrs. Haukesbee is not clearly discriminated from Mrs. Polly Malloze or from Mrs. Harriet Herriott. Mrs. Reiver differs from her hated rival only by being plainly labeled "wicked in a business-way," and "not honestly mischievous like Mrs. Hauksbee."

Kipling finds it difficult to keep his own personality out of that of his creation, and many times has introduced false touches into his very best work. Thus, Bessie, illiterate and immoral, solicits Torpenhow in "The Light that Failed": "Oh, please, 'tisn't as if I was asking you to marry me. I wouldn't think of it. But cou-couldn't you take and live with me till Miss Right comes along? I'm only Miss Wrong, I know, but I'd work my hands to the bare bone for you."

Another singularly infelicitous touch is that where he makes the Brushwood girl, most sensitive and highly-bred of women, exclaim in a moment of strong feeling, "My God!" The story of the "Brushwood Boy" is exquisite in poetic spirituality and is a fearful narrative of George Cottar

and the girl of his dreams. In the first place, a princess from an old illustrated edition of Grimm is seized upon as the girl of his dreams, but after a visit to Oxford, where he comes in direct contact with the real Brushwood Girl at a performance of "Pepper's Ghost," he "shamelessly" discards the princess from the fairy story, and either consciously, or subconsciously installs the "little girl dressed all in black." He has dazzling adventures at home and in the Far East with the dream girl, and, interwoven with his early days in the Indian Army, Kipling has given us the incommunicable stuff from which dreams are made, the ghost-whispers which come out of the darkness, and return again to the darkness.

But one dream with variations comes intermittently to George Cottar for twenty years or more, and each time the Brushwood Girl appears to grow more real. As the dream continues to recur, the power of reality becomes so contagious and overpowering that the reader is forced to conclude that the physical attraction which the dream-girl wields over George Cottar warns him away from all other women. We are glad when Cottar returns to England on furlough and finds the Brushwood Girl of his dreams in Miriam Lacy.

The Blind Woman in "They," Kipling's wonderful story of the souls of dead children, is more mystical than his women in the "Brushwood Boy." Here the master writer has depicted a woman with a love so unhuman and perfect that children who had departed to the Great Beyond are permitted to return to her protection and bounty, a woman who had been childless and lonely for the caressing hands of babies. It is probable that the children in the story are ghost children, who have been drawn to earth again by the mother-love of a childless woman. One is apt to be surprised to discover in Kipling's stories a suggestion of womanly tenderness, but there is an exquisitely delicate subcurrent which is suggestive of the feminine soul in all his

child-sketches. Kipling says: "Only women understand children properly; but if a mere man keeps very quiet and humbles himself properly, and refrains from talking down to his superiors, the children will sometimes be good to him and let him see what they think about the world."

Though Kipling wrote with an almost physical exuberance of strength about the big things of life, yet the tenderness of his character delineation is not entirely confined to children but is sometimes found in the treatment of his women characters. This is particularly so in the story, "Without Benefit of Clergy," where the tremulous passion of Ameera, her hopes, her fears, and her agonies of disappointment, combine to form by far the most tender page which Mr. Kipling has written. According to this narrative John Holden, an Englishman, bought a Musselman's daughter from her grasping hag of a mother, and hired a house for the two. Ameera was very beautiful, and passionately adored Holden, who returned her worship. When she bore him a son, Ameera's cup of happiness was full. But Tota, the "gold-colored little god," after having grown old enough to talk, died of the seasonal autumn fever. Ameera was completely heart-broken, and Holden hardly less so. It needed only the death of Ameera herself, which followed not long afterward, from black cholera, to make the man's desolation complete.

Though Kipling permits his men to honestly love the women of another caste, he visits judgment of the direct order on illicit marriage. Thus in "Beyond the Pale," the love of Trejago, an Englishman, for Bisesa, a pretty Hindu widow of fifteen, resulted in sorrow to the girl as well as to himself. When the affair was discovered by her relatives, barbarous punishment was inflicted on Bisesa, and the man himself was wounded. Thenceforth the girl was lost to him completely.

While it has been maintained that Kip-

ling did not know women well enough to depict them accurately, yet he could weave the most exquisite narratives of love as in the tale "In the Rukh," where Mowgli, of the Jungle Books, reappears as a grown man, and Muller, the fat Dutchman, and Gisborne, sturdy forest officer, form a background for the lightly-sketched child of nature, taming wolf and wild pig. His attachment to Sahib Gisborne, his detection of Abdull's theft, his flight with the latter's daughter, and their subsequent marriage—a wild birds' mating—make a study of great subtlety, and marked by a powerful restraint not usual in Mr. Kipling's work. The story closes with a love idyll of exquisite beauty.

Kipling does not pose as a moralist in his stories for when he writes about the deception of a husband, he treats the woman and the men in the affair with perfect and impartial good humor. In "The Solid Muldoon," Mulvaney tells of the day fourteen years before when he "fought wid woman, man and divil all in the heart av an hour." The woman was Annie Bragin, who "had eyes like the brown av a butterfly's wing whin the sun catches ut;" the man was Annie's jealous husband; the devil was incarnate in the ghost of Corporal Flahy, who, after his wife's death from cholera, "walked afther they buried him, huntin' for her."

On the other hand, many of Kipling's tales point a profound moral in spite of the author's seeming indifference, and it has been said that the powerful story, "Love-o'-Women," is worth a hundred addresses on Social Purity platforms, while it is written with an artistic reticence beyond all praise. In this the faces of ruined women appearing before the vision of Larry Tighe, nicknamed Love-o'-Women, bring to him a most impressive remorse. His favorite amusement was that of seducing innocent women, but, at length, he is haunted by his malign deeds, the crown

of his punishment being the memory of one woman whom he might have loved, but whom he had ruined and cast away. The dramatic ending of this tale makes the man discover this former sweetheart and die in her arms. He completes the tragedy by committing suicide.

It has been said that Kipling is not essentially a woman's writer, while certain critics have contended that he is deficient in that special perception that is required to understand the feminine soul. One reviewer has said: "Kipling's female characters are rather irritating, because like many another clever man, when he talks about women he is talking of what he does not understand; but his loyal English gentlemen, who would scorn a dirty action, yet are in no way 'superior persons,' his very human Tommies, whose only faults are generous ones, the whole spirit of vigor and freshness, of large tolerance for human frailties, of simple matter-of-fact devotion to duty, which pervades his works, backed by the glamour which he can throw over commonplaces, appeal very largely to a woman's imagination, even if her heart be not thereby reached."

Thus in his cynical and brutal "Record of Badalia Herodsfoot," he tells of a woman of the London slums and, according to J. M. Barrie, the story is "merely a very clever man's treatment of a land he knows little of." Badalia has been deserted by her drunken husband, and enlisted by a devout young curate in the work of distributing relief among his neighbors. She secretly loves the curate, who in turn is in love with Sister Eva, a companion-worker from his own social class. Badalia's husband finally returns, drunk, and demanding money. On the woman's refusal to yield the sum intrusted to her keeping by the clergyman, the man strikes and mortally wounds her. The curate and Eva are summoned to Badalia's death-bed. The dying woman attempts to shield her husband, and,

confessing with regard to the curate that she'd "sooner ha' took up with 'im than any one," counsels him to wed Sister Eva. Her final injunction is, "Make it a four-pound-ten funeral—with a pall."

Kipling's characterization of women is less convincing than his characterization of men, and nothing could show more clearly his attempts to remedy this fault, and the inevitable check that it has put upon him, than a study of some of his stories. He attributes to his Oriental leaning his aversion to dealing with women "outside her house in fiction properly so-called." He says: "She is delightful in real life; but one has seen a little too much of her in literature. . . . There are so many other subjects." This statement is very true, and plainly shows us why he does not interest us so much in love affairs. Practically all of the stories in the book, "Under the Deodars," exemplify the foregoing, for instance, "The Education of Otis Yeere," a tale which has for its motive the failure of a platonic friendship. The well-known Kipling character, Mrs. Hauksbee, attempts to act the role of "guide, philosopher and friend" toward Otis Yeere, a thoroughly honest but commonplace and discouraged man. Her purpose is only half selfish. She desires to draw the man out of himself, to inspire in him new confidence in his abilities and new interest in life. He repays her by falling madly in love. When she repulses his advances angrily, he is completely crushed.

Mrs. Hauksbee and Mrs. Mallowe are neither edifying nor charming companions. Their cynicism falls upon one and their occasional lapses into womanliness fail to be convincing. In both "The Education of Otis Yeere" and "A Second Rate Woman," Kipling's delineations of female characters are clever and caustic enough, but they leave a disagreeable taste in the mouth. This is also true of "Wressley of

the Foreign Office," a story in the volume, "Plain Tales from the Hills," where Wressley fell in love with a pretty, frivolous girl, and decided that the best work of his career should be laid reverently at her feet. She is as heartless and ruthless as Maisie in "The Light that Failed," when he writes an exhaustive history of Native Rule in Central India, and after months of toil brings the first copy of his book to Miss Venner. This is her review: "Oh, your book? It's all about those howwid Wajahs. I didn't understand it." The man departed, and destroyed the whole edition of the best book of Indian history ever written.

When Kipling has in mind such women, it is not a far cry to "The Vampire," which provoked so much adverse criticism that it has not been included in any of his books of verse. The verses have been extensively parodied, and several clever retaliations have been written by women, as well as by men. Many poets have disputed Kipling's allegation that the man is the everlasting fool, and the woman is the eternal vampire, and some poetry has been written to prove that the tables can be turned so that the vampire becomes a man and the fool, a woman. It occurred to one poet to refute Kipling's conception by a song which began as follows:

"A fool there was and she made her prayer—  
Even as you or I;  
To a beast in his den or a brute in his lair.  
We called him the clod who didn't care,  
But the fool, she called him her hero fair,  
Even as you or I."

Although Kipling finds in his stories and poems small place for passionate love and almost none for spiritual love, yet through all his writings his faith in the love and strength of the home is undimmed. His tender tribute to motherhood in the poem, "Mother o' Mine, O, Mother o' Mine," has been loved by thousands, and his dedication of "Soldiers Three," one of his earliest books, which was published in India when

his literary reputation, at least out there,  
was secure, ends in this address to his  
mother:

"The long bazaar will praise, but thou—  
Heart of my heart—have I done well?"

C. B.

## "The Glory of Toil"

By EDNA DEAN PROCTOR

**W**HETHER they delve in the buried  
coal, or plow the upland  
soil,  
Or man the seas, or measure the suns, hail  
to the men who toil!  
It was stress and strain, in wood and cave,  
while the primal ages ran.  
That broadened the brow, and built the  
brain, and made of a brute a man;  
And better the lot of the sunless mine, the  
fisher's perilous sea,  
Than the slothful ease of him who sleeps in  
the shade of his bread-fruit tree;  
For sloth is death and stress is life in all  
God's realms that are,  
And the joy of the limitless heavens is the  
whirl of star with star!  
Still reigns the ancient order—to sow, and  
reap, and spin;  
But, oh, the spur of the doing! and oh, the  
goals to win!  
Where each, from the least to the greatest,  
must bravely bear his part—  
Make straight the furrows, or shape the  
laws, or dare the crowded mart!  
And he who lays firm the foundations, tho  
strong right arm may tire,  
Is worthy as he who curves the arch and  
dreams the airy spire;  
For both have reared the minster that  
shrines the sacred fire.

Floods down the fairest valleys; fields  
droop in the August blaze;  
Yet rain and sun are God's angels that give  
us the harvest days,  
And toil is the world's salvation, tho stern  
may be its ways;  
Far from the lair it has led us—far from  
the gloom of the cave—  
Till lo, we are lords of Nature, instead of  
her crouching slave!  
And slowly it brings us nearer to the ulti-  
mate goal of things;  
We are weighing the atoms, and wedding  
the seas, and cleaving the air with  
wings;  
And draining the tropic marshes where  
death had lain in wait,  
And piercing the polar solitudes, for all  
their icy state;  
And luring the subtle electric flame to set  
us free from the clod—  
O toiling Brothers, the earth around, we  
are working together with God!  
With God, the infinite Toiler, who dwells  
with His humblest ones,  
And tints the dawn and the lily, and flies  
with the flying suns,  
And forever, through love and service, tho  
days may be drear and dim,  
Is guiding the whole creation up from the  
depths to Him!